

As a veterinarian, I have strong feelings towards the treatment of both farm as well as pet animals.

There are three bills being addressed with hearings on Monday March 17, 2014. I am unable to attend the hearings in person so I am submitting this letter to express my concerns regarding the bills.

I fully support HB 5416 (Section 2) which would ban gestation crates for sows in the state of CT. Since there are no gestation crates in CT at this time, it is important to ban this extremely cruel practice from entering our state in the future. This not only protects pigs from extremely inhumane treatment, it also protects small operations farmers from having big business come in and undermine their livelihood.

I oppose HB 5080, which would allow Sunday hunting. People use parks and other hunting habitat for recreation. Sunday's should be kept as one day that people can be free of the potential for running into a deer running injured with an arrow stuck in it's body, or be in the line of fire from an overzealous hunter.

I also support S.B. 445, the "puppy mill bill". I'm happy to see CT moving in the right direction of addressing the source of puppies sold in stores in CT. However, as a veterinarian, I see puppy store puppies first hand. I see their vet records when they come to their first visit with me. I'm always amazed at the number of vaccines and anti parasite medications tiny 8 week old puppies have been given. These puppies come from puppy mills, backyard breeders in the south and midwest (mills), and other shady breeding facilities. The USDA's attempts to regulate thousands of dog breeding facilities can't come close to doing the job it needs to to protect the commercial mill breeding dogs. Not only are most of them living in filth, on wire, and without medical or grooming care, they are also exposed to viral and parasitic diseases that are a result of the filthy conditions that are inevitable when keeping large numbers of dogs together without proper care. Hence, the need for an unusually high number of vaccines and antiparasite medications given to tiny young puppies. Many puppies come with parvo virus, concidia, and other illnesses that either kill them or end up costing their new family thousands of dollars and much heartache. The increased amount of compensation for puppy illness is not adequate to cover the expense incurred when a puppy store puppy is very ill or has a congenital defect that is identified only after the new owners take the puppy for it's first checkup with a veterinarian.

So, while the bill's attempt at controlling where puppies can be purchased for sale in puppy stores in CT, it doesn't address the main source of the problem- the health and welfare of the breeding dogs or the puppies being sold, or the rights of the consumer to purchase a viable, healthy product, in this case, a puppy.

In addition, puppy mills and backyard breeders don't follow their genetic lines or do necessary genetic screening for disease inherent in a particular breed of dog. Responsible breeders screen their dogs for a variety of congenital and hereditary diseases. They cull breeding stock to avoid passing along deadly disease traits to their puppies. This is not the case for dogs in puppy mills. The only way to keep our state of CT clean of any relationship to the sad exploitation of dogs is to ban puppy sales from new stores applying to open in CT, and to phase out the sale of commercially bred puppies from existing stores over the next five years, at most. Please add these two points to the bill to create a bill that will truly protect dogs.

Thank you,

Melissa Shapiro, DVM